



AETC News Clips

Randolph AFB, Texas



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AF to leave Brooks

Web Posted: 08/26/2005 12:13 AM CDT

Gary Martin
Express-News Washington Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Pentagon's plan to build a mega-medical center at Fort Sam Houston was endorsed Thursday by a base closure and realignment panel that also pulled the plug on Air Force research at Brooks City-Base.

As expected, the 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, known as BRAC, opted to close the Air Force portion of the city-run Brooks base, which began as an Army flight training center in 1918.

However, it moved the directed-energy research center at Brooks to Fort Sam Houston, saving 275 jobs that were scheduled to be transferred elsewhere.

"San Antonio is clearly a big winner for Texas," said Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas,

The medical research and facilities that San Antonio would receive under the proposals would have "enormous long-term benefits," she added.

San Antonio is projected to have a net increase of more than 4,000 jobs as the result of realignments and the consolidation of medical training, research and ambulatory care at Brooke Army Medical Center and Fort Sam Houston.

It was a reversal of fortune for a city that suffered a major blow in 1995, when the previous base closure commission closed Kelly AFB and its aircraft repair facility, eliminating 10,000 civilian jobs.

"For those of us who were here 10 years ago, it's the difference between night and day," said Joe Krier with the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

Building a regional military medical complex at Fort Sam Houston would include the closure of Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB, and the transfer of dental training from Sheppard AFB in Wichita Falls, which means the loss of 2,100 jobs there.

North Texas officials fought the transfer, and Hutchison vowed to seek new missions for Sheppard to offset those losses and the transfer of Joint Strike Fighter training to Eglin AFB in Florida.

The moves are part of the Pentagon plan to scuttle 33 major military bases and realign 29 others in an attempt to streamline the armed forces and save an estimated \$48.8 billion over the next 20 years.

The nine-member BRAC commission has until Sept. 8 to review and finalize the list of cuts and submit it to President Bush, who has indicated he'll approve it.

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Congress could reject the base closure list, but it has not done so in the four previous rounds.

Thursday, the BRAC panel overwhelmingly endorsed a \$2.4 billion Pentagon plan to consolidate medical care to Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and to Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston.

The blueprint calls for the consolidation of medical training at Fort Sam Houston, which would bring 9,000 personnel to San Antonio.

Commissioner Sue Turner, a retired Air Force general who once served as the chief of nursing at Wilford Hall, said she enthusiastically endorsed the proposal, although it did play on her loyalty to the aging hospital.

"I've been accused of having it tattooed on my chest," said Turner, who lives in San Antonio.

"This is a really difficult decision for me."

She said community concerns about the loss of a Level 1 trauma center at Wilford Hall, and its health care for thousands of retired Air Force personnel, would be addressed by a new out-patient facility to be built at Lackland and the expansion of emergency care at BAMC.

Consolidating medical training and care into state-of-the-art facilities for veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan would be "an extraordinary move," said Commissioner Lloyd "Fig" Newton, a retired Air Force general.

However, the commission scoffed at the \$2.4 billion price tag to build the new centers, accusing the Pentagon of low-balling the estimate.

The panel also cast doubt on the Pentagon's forecast of \$476 million in savings to be achieved from consolidation.

In addition to the transfer of medical operations from Lackland, Fort Sam Houston would house the consolidated medical units from Sheppard, Navy Medical Center San Diego, Navy Medical Center Portsmouth and enlisted training at Great Lakes, Ill.

BRAC summary

Brooks City-Base: Air Force leaving facility, moving 2,648 positions to Fort Sam Houston, Lackland, Randolph, other bases

Lackland AFB: Wilford Hall becoming ambulatory center; various realignments; 2,340 jobs moved

Fort Sam Houston: Approval of regional medical center and various realignments bringing net gain of 9,364 positions

Randolph AFB: Various realignments moving units in and out will result in a net gain of 182 positions

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The commission voted in unison to approve the regional consolidations at Fort Sam Houston and Navy Medical Center Bethesda, and close the historic Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the District of Columbia.

Fort Sam Houston would see an increase of 275 personnel from Tri-Services Directed Energy Research Laboratory at Brooks after the panel voted unanimously to alter the Pentagon recommendation to close the military portion of the base.

Research at the directed-energy lab was slated to move to Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio.

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, said that while he was disappointed on the panel's decision on Brooks, the vote to keep the research "is a victory."

The School of Aerospace Medicine at Brooks, and its 400 positions, would still be moved to Wright-Patterson, along with a centrifuge that will cost the military \$30 million to disassemble and rebuild.

Closure of the Air Force component at Brooks would save the military \$940 million over 20 years, according to the Pentagon.

Still, roughly one-third of the 2,100 jobs at Brooks will remain in San Antonio, coupled with the 800 personnel at the Crypto logic Systems Group at Lackland that was spared transfer by the commission on Wednesday.

"I'm thrilled," said retired Brig. Gen. John Jernigan, who headed the San Antonio Military Missions Task Force and became the architect for blueprint to save area installations.

"I if could have asked for this outcome at the beginning of the process, I would have taken it," said Jernigan, a former commander of Brooks.

San Antonio businesses and universities sought to keep research and high-technology functions at Brooks and Lackland to position the city in the growing industries of cyber security and biomedical research, said Lyle Larson, a Bexar County commission and member of the task force.

"San Antonio is a lot bigger winner now that these recommendations have been turned around," Larson said. "It means billions in new activity."

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Local officials see more good than bad in BRAC

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Scott Huddleston
Express-News Staff Writer

Local officials hailed Thursday's base-closure outcome as a victory for San Antonio, despite the recommended closure of Brooks City-Base as an Air Force facility.

"In general I'm very pleased with the BRAC decision," Mayor Phil Hardberger said. "We made a convincing case for the cryptology center to stay here and that's important because they have seven different agencies working together. To break that up and send them to different states doesn't make sense from a national security standpoint."

When he heard the city could gain 4,200 jobs in this base-closure round, Bob Sanchez, who was chairman of the South Side Chamber of Commerce in 1995, recalled a photo of himself and other local leaders at a news conference on the government's decision to close Kelly AFB.

"If you saw that photo, you would think we were at a funeral," said Sanchez, a member of the San Antonio Military Missions Task Force.

Now, even though the city stands to lose jobs at Brooks — another historical military-aviation landmark — Sanchez and others were jubilant Thursday.

The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission agreed to move cryptology research at Lackland and a joint directed-energy mission at Brooks to Fort Sam Houston instead of sending them to other communities.

San Antonio now stands to gain 4,200 jobs instead of the 3,100 expected earlier.

Counting the net gain of jobs, Hardberger said the city actually gains from BRAC. For future realignment and closure procedures, he said the city should continue its course of giving a little ground to gain in other areas.

Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff said San Antonio is poised to look to the medical and military fields for economic stability and growth.

"Now I think we're in a really, really strong position," he said. "We were a big winner today."

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County Commissioner Lyle Larson said a local contingent now in Washington had targeted the cryptology and directed-energy work as missions they should try to keep in San Antonio since "they were the jobs that pay the most, and had the most synergy in the community with the private sector."

"This is beyond our expectations," he said.

The local delegation tried to save aerospace medicine missions at Brooks. But the cards seemed stacked in favor of Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, which was awarded that work.

Former Mayor Howard Peak, chairman of the Brooks Development Authority, said the base is "well-positioned to succeed, no matter what happens." The city acquired the property three years ago and has since maintained it, cutting the Air Force's operating costs in half, and the authority has crafted a master plan to convert Brooks to a business and technology park.

"Because of the groundwork we've laid, we're three years ahead of the curve," Peak said.

His main concern was tracking the progress of missions that would relocate. Although they would be scheduled to begin leaving in the next two years, if the closure plan is approved by Congress and the president, it could take up to six years to move some of the labs because construction elsewhere would have to be finished first.

The Air Force's departure would mark the end of an era dating to 1917, when Brooks was founded as a pilot-training base. It later became an asset for the U.S. space program. The powdered orange space drink Tang and golden helmet visors worn by astronauts were developed there, and some of the first creatures Americans put in space — monkeys in the 1950s — were studied there.

Sheila Klein, executive director of the Brooks Heritage Foundation, said she thinks Brooks will survive and thrive.

"I always like to refer to Brooks as a chameleon," she said. "Brooks has always had a remarkable ability to morph into whatever the space program, the U.S. Air Force or this country needed it to be."

The Challenger Learning Center, which has no formal Air Force ties, still is serving more than 10,000 school students annually, giving them a chance to simulate space shuttle missions and consider science as a career, Klein said.

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Editorial: City scores big wins in base closure votes

Web Posted: 08/26/2005 12:00 AM CDT

San Antonio Express-News

Despite losing Air Force research at Brooks City-Base, San Antonio was a big winner Thursday as a base closure panel approved plans to build a regional military medical complex at Fort Sam Houston.

If approved by President Bush and Congress, the base realignment plan would provide \$1 billion worth of investment to build a world-class regional medical center at Fort Sam Houston and consolidate military medical training.

The joint medical operation at Fort Sam Houston's Brooke Army Medical Center would be one of two major military medical centers in the country. The other is planned for Bethesda, Md.

The commission voted to close Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB and replace it with a new outpatient facility.

From a citywide point of view, this major plum surpasses the loss of the Air Force missions at Brooks City-Base, which the 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission voted to move on Thursday.

Another mitigating factor in the Brooks situation was the panel's decision to move the Tri-services Directed Energy Research Laboratory from Brooks to Fort Sam Houston.

That decision would keep an additional 275 jobs in San Antonio, by maintaining the Navy and Air Force components of the operation with the Army portion, which already was designated to go to Fort Sam Houston by Pentagon planners.

Another pleasant surprise came on Wednesday when the base closure commission voted to keep the Cryptologic Systems Group at Lackland. The group works with cyber security communications for federal intelligence agencies.

That move preserved 800 jobs at Lackland that were slated to be moved elsewhere.

This year's base closure process was far more pleasant for the Alamo City than the one 10 years ago that resulted in the closure of Kelly AFB.

Bush has said he is likely to approve the panel's recommendations for dozens of closures and realignments, which are designed to save billions of dollars for the Pentagon over the next 20 years.

The commission didn't rubber-stamp the Pentagon blueprint, making independent decisions that it believed best served the nation's military readiness and fiscal needs.

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While the decisions both helped and hurt the economies of cities around the nation, military needs rightly were the first priority in the base closure and realignment process.

San Antonio was lucky that those military needs aligned with the city's economic interests. The future of the military in San Antonio looks a lot brighter today than it did 10 years ago, and that is a legitimate cause for celebration.

Visionary planning by the region's congressional delegation and local officials who drafted the experimental city-base concept at Brooks will serve the San Antonio area well as the Air Force leaves the facility.

Efforts to create a research park at the location are well under way and should play a major role in the revitalization of the South Side that appears to be within the city's grasp.

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BRAC panel begins voting on bases

From Staff and Wire Reports

The commission considering the Pentagon's proposal to restructure hundreds of U.S. military bases began voting today on which ones to close and which ones to keep in the largest defense consolidation ever.

The nine-member federal panel is expected to work through Friday, when it's scheduled to take up the Air Force recommendations that include enlarging Columbus Air Force Base's operations.

The commission voted this morning to close Naval Station Pascagoula. The Mississippi Gulf Coast base has 963 employees and five ships.

While it is one of the Navy's newest facilities, the commission agreed the base lacks military value.

"This one comes closest to being a no-brainer than any decision we have," said Commission Member Harold Gehman, a retired admiral.

As it began final voting today in Washington, D.C., with lightning speed, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission signed off on shutting nearly 400 Army Reserve and National Guard facilities in dozens of states, cre-

ating instead new joint centers.

Before voting started, BRAC Commission Chairman Anthony Principi said reviewing the proposal to close or shrink hundreds of bases set a daunting and unprecedented challenge for commissioners.

"The commission went to extraordinary lengths to ensure the soundness, correctness and integrity of the base realignment and closure process and to fulfill our commitment to transparency, honesty and fairness for all," said Principi, a former Veterans Affairs secretary.

He said the task was especially difficult because Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's proposal included more than double the recommendations in the four previous rounds of base closings combined.

Deliberations

Opening at least three days of final deliberations on which bases to spare and which to scrap, Principi said the commission recognizes that closing bases is necessary to save money and transform the military to meet new challenges.

"At the same time, we know that the decisions we reach will have a profound impact on the communities hosting our military installations, and more importantly, on the people who bring those communities to life," he said.

Columbus Air Force Base is the only major Mississippi military installation that would gain

from the proposed BRAC plan.

CAFB gains

Under the Pentagon's proposal, the base, which already employs 3,100 military and civilian workers, would pick up 104 military personnel and three civilian positions. Another 70 private-sector jobs would be created.

As proposed by the Department of Defense, CAFB would pick up part of the fighter-pilot training program now at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia. In addition to more employees, this would bring about 30 more planes to Columbus.

Bringing CAFB more people and planes is part of the overall efforts to consolidate military facilities around the country. For the Air Force alone, there are 207 changes proposed in base closures, expansions or reductions, according to BRAC Commission statistics.

Previous BRAC commissions in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 adopted about 85 percent of what the military had proposed, but this panel might exercise more independence in rejecting Pentagon recommendations. The commission does "not want to be a rubberstamp," Principi said.

However, the commission is not expected to turn down the military brass' plans for expanding CAFB.

"That appears to be solid now," former CAFB commander Nick Ardillo of Columbus said last month after the commission voted to keep the plans for the base intact.

There had been a suggestion that could have resulted in CAFB not getting the additions proposed by the Department of Defense.

Nine Mississippi facilities are part of the Pentagon's proposal to

close or realign hundreds of military facilities around the country.

Statewide, Mississippi would lose 1,678 military, civilian and contractor jobs at the military installations under the Pentagon's recommendations.

Lamar McDonald, appointed by Gov. Haley Barbour to head the Mississippi Military Communities Council, said he has worked with the state's military communities in hopes of convincing the BRAC panel to spare Mississippi's bases.

"We have made a very, very good case and presentation and that's about as much as you can possibly do," he said. "We just hope we get a good hearing out of five commissioners. That's what we need — a simple majority."

State bases

The Pentagon's plans include closing or reducing the capacity of seven facilities in Mississippi with the biggest reduction of jobs at Naval Station Pascagoula, which the Pentagon says should be shut down.

While Columbus Air Force Base and a Jackson Air Guard Station could gain jobs under the plan, Pascagoula would lose 963 jobs if the Naval base closes. Officials have said a lack of multiple missions and the fact that two of the base's largest ships have been decommissioned make the facility a prime target.

McDonald said the suggestion to close Naval Station Pascagoula and Naval Station Ingleside, on the Texas Gulf Coast, would leave the Gulf of Mexico open to threats.

"Pascagoula is more centrally located and can protect south toward South America," he said.



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Economists: Effects won't leave huge mark on city

By Robert Morgan/Times Record News
August 26, 2005, Page 1A

Local economists and business owners remain optimistic about the Wichita Falls area financial outlook, despite the outcome of Thursday's Base Realignment and Closure Commission's decisions.

John Martinez, professor of economics at Midwestern State University, acknowledged that jobs will eventually be lost at Sheppard Air Force Base, but he estimated "the economic impact to be between \$48 million and \$68 million."

Martinez presented these figures during a Board of Commerce and Industry news conference Thursday.

"While we don't want to dismiss the economic impact this decision will have on selected businesses, this loss will be offset by an annual growth rate (of) 3 to 4 percent, resulting in a smaller negative impact," Martinez said.

The financial loss translates to a 1.5-percent hit to North Texas's regional economy, which is comprised of 12 counties with an overall economic base of \$5 billion.

"The loss is not insurmountable," Martinez said.

Another Midwestern economics professor stressed that the losses will not be immediate.

"They (Sheppard jobs) are not going away at the end of the year," Jim Owen, assistant economics professor and director of the Bureau of Business and Government Research, said.

Instead, the jobs will not be completely lost until 2009. And following the realignment completion is another Base Realignment and Closure committee meeting in 2010.

"At that time, you never know if Sheppard will gain more or not," Owen said.

Owen sees the economic fallout spreading out among several different entities, but not with enough impact to force any businesses to shut down.

Sheppard still has "a heavy-duty presence in Wichita Falls. Businesses will not shut up and blow away," Owen said.

People who went into business around the Sheppard area did so for economic reasons, Owen said. But to rely solely on SAFB would not have been a rational business choice.

His outlook for the apartment buildings cropping up near the base is likewise optimistic.

Of those losing jobs at SAFB, probably a large majority were housed on base, he said. These apartments are being built because there is an economic need for them.

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Dave Lilley, CEO of Trinity Hughes, echoes Owen's housing sentiment. Lilley is the developer behind Stone Gate apartments, located off of Missile Road.

Apartments are needed in this area because other apartment communities have become antiquated, he said.

What has happened to Sheppard has not changed Lilley's plans as a developer, a businessman or a resident.

Lilley said he sees the I-44 corridor as an opportunity for growth that will continue to flourish.

The news about Sheppard is not good news, he said, but it is not as bad as it could have been.

"Sheppard Air Force Base is not going anywhere," Lilley said.

Owen took the same glass half-full stance as Lilley. He cited the closures of Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota and Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico as his proof.

The closure of Ellsworth resulted in the loss of 2,769 military and civilian personnel. Cannon's closure resulted in the loss of 3,753 military and civilian personnel.

Compared to what else occurred in the nation, Owen said, Sheppard's loss is not a huge deal.

Martinez said the long-term impact of Sheppard's loss would be nonexistent.

He compared the impact of Sheppard's realignment to the 1979 tornado in Wichita Falls. The destruction caused by the '79 tornado has no current impact on the economy.

Yes, it destroyed houses and killed people, but the economy bounced back, he said. The losses at the base will affect every sector of this community, but the economy will survive.

"Economies tend to be resilient," he said.

Jobs realigned - 1,800

Economic impact - \$48 to \$68 million

- 1.5 percent of North Texas' regional economy

Completion of realignment - 2009

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Exchange program connects U.S., Dutch Airmen

F16.net

Friday, August 26, 2005 - Training young pilots to push the F-16 Fighting Falcon to its operational limits is a job Lt. Col. David Stine loves as much as flying. Even better is doing both those things with the Royal [Netherlands](#) Air Force, he said. That is just what he has done for three years as an exchange pilot at this busy fighter base.

The colonel is a training instructor pilot with the Dutch air force's 306th Tactical Fighter Training Squadron. He said the job is satisfying and has an important purpose.

"From the start, I try to instill in young pilots what it is to be a fighter pilot," said Colonel Stine, on exchange from the Arizona Air National Guard's 162nd Fighter Wing at Tucson, Ariz.

And the Dutch need fighter pilots as they take on a more active NATO role, he said. That is evident here, where the Dutch air force's 1st Fighter Wing has a key NATO strike mission - supply U.S. Air Force munitions. The Dutch are deploying F-16s to help fight the war on terrorism. So interaction between the air forces is vital to maintaining a close working bond.

"A key part of the exchange program is exposing both countries to each other's way of doing business," Colonel Stein said. "You share ideas and learn different things from each other."

That is even more important at deployed locations where Airmen from the two countries provide close-air support to ground forces.

But there are still different standards that prevail in each air force, the colonel said. And when the two air forces fly together - like the first year the Dutch went to Afghanistan - they had to work and resolve issues.

That is why the exchange is so vital, he said. So the learning process, the interaction, starts early. Dutch students, and those from other NATO countries flying F-16s, go through the Euro-NATO joint jet undergraduate pilot training course at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. Then they go to Tucson for their initial F-16 flight training. They then return to their country for theater qualifications training, which prepares them for flight operations over Europe.

"When they train in Tucson, they don't have much weather to deal with," the colonel said. "But here, you have quite a bit of weather. So that's one thing they have learned to deal with."

But the biggest difference they face is learning to fly the Dutch F-16, early models that have undergone a midlife upgrade. The jets have colorful, multifunctional display units, better radar and much improved avionics very similar to the avionics in U.S. Air Force's [Block 50](#) F-16s, the colonel said. Students must undergo extensive training to master the war jet.

"Basically, they have a whole new jet they must learn to fly," the colonel said.

Training is not easy, and the colonel does not treat his students with kid gloves. He must ensure they know their chosen profession, and that "they know their jet inside and out."

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"That means everything," he said. "Knowing all the standards and emergency procedures cold, learning the tactics cold, and working all of these things together."

Students learn in the classroom and simulator training, the flightline, flight training and instructors' mentoring.

But the colonel's job is not all about training. He is learning, too. He said the Dutch do "some interesting" procedures with their F-16s the Air Force does not do that "we could think about employing," he said.

However, it will be up to Maj. Joe Thomas, also from the Tucson Guard unit, to take those procedures back home. The colonel's replacement, the major will not be a training instructor. Instead, he will fly with the operational 311th Fighter Squadron. The unit, he said, has a high operations tempo similar to that American pilots deal with. He will get to fly three or four times a week.

"This is an outstanding opportunity to do something new, something important," he said.

The switch in the exchange pilot's job is part of a "new thrust" at the Tucson wing -- an attempt to work closely with the Dutch on tactic development.

"I will be able to tie in exactly to my experiences here," Major Thomas said. "Then I can take them back home and have the knowledge of how things are done here. This is our emphasis."

That kind of operational exchange is extremely important for the F-16 community, he said. Much of the aircraft's development has been a joint partnership between the Air Force and the NATO nations that fly the jet - and that also have exchange pilots. It is even more important for the Tucson-based unit, which provides NATO F-16 pilots initial flight training.

"It's important our pilots fly with their young pilots, teaching them and helping them learn correctly," the major said. "It's important to get feedback from the NATO and American sides."

That is so, he said, when the air forces work together, their joint operations are seamless.

Seamless describes U.S.-Dutch operations here, Colonel Stein said. That is also the key to successful NATO operations. Future joint operations will also be vital. Like the Air Force, the Dutch are waiting to receive the Joint Strike Fighter to replace their aging F-16s.

After his three-year tour, he said, "The Dutch are professionals and staunch NATO allies."

Colonel Stein returns to Tucson shortly and will pass to guardsmen what he learned about U.S.-Dutch operations, and he might be able to rejoin his adopted squadron soon. The Dutch are in negotiations with the Air Force to move their tactical fighter training squadron to Tucson.

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Impact not certain

Despite ruling, some say base could see gains

By Michael Hines/Times Record News
August 26, 2005, 1B

The reality of Sheppard Air Force Base's job losses may come four years from now, but that didn't make it any easier to take for local leaders. Some took comfort in predicting the number of personnel stationed at Sheppard might rise, despite Base Realignment and Closure Commission cuts.

BRAC commissioners whittled jobs away from Sheppard Thursday.

For SAFB, the Pentagon put estimated job losses from medical training realignment at 2,378 jobs directly and 1,585 indirectly. That's about 4.26 percent of the area's employment.

But local leaders dispute the numbers and their impact.

The Wichita Falls Area Military Affairs Committee projects direct job losses from the medical group would be 1,784 based on current levels at the base. Along with indirect losses, the job reduction would hit 2,961. That estimate shows about 1,000 fewer job losses than the Pentagon's estimate of 4,000.

Still, the outcome didn't come with any less sting, said Kay Yeager, chairwoman for the Wichita Falls Area Military Affairs Committee.

"Obviously we're disappointed," she said. "We had come up with an approach that I thought had some validity and that found a hole in their reasoning."

MAC made a case at a regional meeting in San Antonio and with BRAC staffers that the criteria used to assess military value should be recalculated. Committee members said too much weight was placed on having clinical facilities near areas conducting the first phase of medical training.

During the morning meeting, however, BRAC officials were told that such concerns didn't rise to the level necessary to avert base changes.

"I wasn't happy" after seeing that, Yeager said.

The breakdown of numbers reveals that students will be the biggest loss.

MAC data shows that students will comprise 1,191 of the 2,961 expected losses. Another 531 losses will be permanent-party jobs. The numbers differ from the Pentagon estimates because they reflect current estimates of base personnel, said Tim Chase, president of the Board of Commerce & Industry.

Student enrollment "fluctuates so widely that it's difficult to come up with a number," Chase said.

But the actual number of personnel at SAFB might not decline.

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"We have been told that we were at a peak two years ago," Chase said. "Now, those levels are at their lowest point."

That's because the Air Force lowered the number of students going through training in order to get the service down to authorized strength, said Darrell Coleman, vice chairman of military affairs for BCI. Coleman said the Air Force is likely to "ramp up" the number of students once authorized levels are achieved again.

But Chase cautioned that predicting those numbers to increase by the time BRAC is enacted is virtually impossible right now.

"It's a function of national events" and other factors, Chase said.

Still, he said, "My gut feeling would be that we'd have more students."

Efforts to offset the losses would help the chances that more students come into the base, Yeager said.

"I think it depends on if we can backfill," she said. "We have to figure out what can be put out there."

The BRAC Commission also redirected Sheppard's Joint Strike Fighter component to Florida. On paper, that realignment amounts to 295 direct jobs and 192 indirect jobs. But those were projected jobs that don't actually exist yet at Sheppard

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Area towns hopeful

Wait-and-see attitude prevails following ruling

By Stacy Horany
August 26, 2005, Page 1B

Loss of personnel at Sheppard Air Force Base might impact the economies and school districts of Burkburnett and Iowa Park, but one community leader sees a bright side.

"It's our understanding that a majority of the folks that are affected don't live in Burkburnett anyway," said Burkburnett City Manager Mike Slye. "I think the entire region will be impacted somewhat, but I don't think we will see any more or any less of an impact than anywhere else."

Slye said the city is still going to focus on developing the I-44 corridor, business interests and life in Burkburnett.

"It won't have a direct impact on Burkburnett as far as residential life and the commercial end of things are concerned," Slye said.

Burkburnett Development Corporation Board president Barney Fudge said the community has always been supportive of the base and will continue to be so. He also said his organization has been working with the Wichita Falls Board of Commerce & Industry and the Military Affairs Committee to establish an ongoing committee to look after Sheppard and the communities that have a relationship with the base.

"We want to establish the committee so that we're not always reacting and that we will have information on hand," Fudge said. "Sheppard is economically important to our whole region, and we've always just kind of assumed that it will always be here, but now we know that might not be the case," he said.

But for Burkburnett Independent School District superintendent Danny Taylor, the news of the realignment strikes close to home.

"Over 38 percent of my students are military dependents. Any realignment can have either a positive or a negative impact on my district," Taylor said. He said his district stands to lose about 100 students and about \$600,000 in revenue.

But Taylor said he is keeping a wait-and-see attitude. The changes won't affect the area until about 2009. He said by that time, some military parents in the district might already be reassigned to other areas anyway.

For Iowa Park Consolidated Independent School District superintendent Jerry Baird, the wait-and-see attitude also prevails.

"The impact is hard for us to get a handle on at this point," Baird said.

He said Iowa Park has quite a few residents who are employed at the base, and any reduction in force is not going to be good for the community.

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"We'll just have to remain optimistic and look ahead to the future. If there is any positive in this, it is that we will at least have a timeline to make adjustments," Baird said. He said he hopes Sheppard is considered for other military components that might be stationed at the base.

Education reporter Ann Work contributed to this report. Regional reporter Stacy Horany can be reached at 940-763-7548 or by e-mail at horanys@TimesRecordNews.com.

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Our Opinions: Never again

Decision on SAFB hurts, but city must work hard, remain resilient

August 26, 2005, 6B

It always hurts to lose.

And Wichita Falls lost on Thursday when Sheppard Air Force Base lost a major training program that will be moved to San Antonio.

We need to remind ourselves that this community did not go down without a fight, and a good one.

Massive amounts of time were spent by the Military Affairs Committee, headed up by Kay Yeager, the Board of Commerce and Industry staff and the staff working for U.S. Rep. Mac Thornberry.

(It should be noted for the record that our efforts had no help from the governor's office, which poured millions of dollars into Corpus Christi to try to save Ingleside.)

Those who worked so hard deserve the thanks of the community.

They gave it their best shot.

But this is not, as they say, the end of the world, and the community must move on to replace the lost jobs and to protect Sheppard from now on.

Frankly, some here took the base for granted. We weren't vigilant enough.

That can happen no more.

The Military Affairs Committee must continue in existence to keep a constant eye on the Department of Defense and the Air Force to watch for any changes that might affect Sheppard and its programs. It will need funding from public and private sources, and given what happened on Thursday that can't be emphasized enough.

Likewise, the BCI must keep a strong focus on the base and reinforce the community's relationship with the base and its leadership and personnel. More emphasis needs to be put on the Squadron Adoption Program. Before he left as commander of the 82nd Training, Arnold Rooney also suggested that Sheppard and the communities of Burkburnett, Iowa Park and Wichita Falls develop a leadership program so that members of each community could become thoroughly familiar with base training operations and likewise the commanders could develop relationships with key figures in each city. That needs to happen, too.

The full effects of Thursday's BRAC decision will not be felt until 2009, so all three cities have time to scout out other opportunities for stability and growth.

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They need to continue to push for all maintenance training for Unmanned Aerial Vehicles to be consolidated at Sheppard.

Existing businesses and industries, from the moms and pops to the PPGs can't fall off the radar. The BCI and allies must continue to ensure that community ties with all those who contribute to our economic base are solid. We can't afford to lose anyone. Perhaps we can help them to build.

The BCI constantly recruits for relocations and for new industry development. That's just a given, so it's difficult to see what they might do better other than to increasingly focus on a chamber-of-commerce component.

Finally, we must all continue to be optimistic about our future. Wichita Falls has weathered much more difficulties than this (a major example: the tornado of April 10, 1979; another: the oil crash of the mid-1980s).

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Planning ahead

SAFB already working to gain UAV training programs later

By Michael Martinez/Times Record News
August 26, 2005, Page 1A

Wichita Falls tried to change the minds of base-closing commissioners by urging them to add training programs at Sheppard Air Force Base rather than cutting.

City advocates recommended Sheppard as a site for maintenance of an Unmanned Aerial Vehicles training program.

UAVs are being increasingly deployed in Iraq and in other areas, and there is no such centralized program, said Darrell Coleman, one of the delegates who argued the Wichita Falls' case in front of Base Realignment and Closure commissioners.

"Because of the fast-paced growth of UAVs forecast by the Department of Defense, a substantial maintenance training center will need to come online in the very near future," a Wichita Falls proposal to BRAC commissioners said. "Sheppard should become the Center of Excellence for Joint Unmanned Aerial Vehicles maintenance training."

Sheppard is already performing maintenance on and rebuilding some UAVs, according to that proposal. And it already has training courses in place for the engines of two unmanned vehicle types - the Global Hawk and the Predator.

The Pentagon projects that nearly 1,500 UAVs will be in service by 2009. Based on those numbers, the proposal suggests that by 2009 the Global Hawk airplane type will require 153 maintainers. Such a maintenance program would require an annual average of 40 students and 12 instructors.

A Predator program would require 1,083 maintainers, which would call for an annual average of 270 students and 79 instructors.

Establishing these programs at SAFB would help replace a number of the jobs that are scheduled for relocation to San Antonio, in accordance with Thursday's BRAC decisions.

"We've got the best people and the best training school," said Coleman.

Centralizing the maintenance training for UAVs in Wichita Falls is a decision that cannot be made right now - it's a longer-term strategy to replace lost jobs at Sheppard. But it "seems only logical," Coleman said.

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With a clipped wing

Despite BRAC vote, officials optimistic about Sheppard AFB

By Tara Copp/Scripps Howard News Service
August 26, 2005, Page 1A

WASHINGTON - More than 2,300 jobs at Sheppard Air Force Base were cut Thursday by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

The positions in basic and specialty enlisted training will go to the new San Antonio Regional Medical Center as part of a major overhaul and consolidation of the nation's military medical community.

"This is very disappointing for Wichita Falls," said Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison after the vote. Hutchison said she pressed the commissioners to keep the dental school at Sheppard, but "the commissioners felt the dental part needed to be located with the other facilities."

Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Amarillo, was traveling out of the country when the vote was taken.

"I am disappointed, but I will do everything I can to see that there is as little disruption as possible in the local economy and that Sheppard continues to be one of the premiere bases in the country," he said in a statement.

In its initial estimate of job losses to Wichita Falls through the medical realignment, the Pentagon estimated that 2,378 jobs directly tied to Sheppard's medical community would be lost, and 1,585 indirect jobs would be lost or about 4.26 percent of the area's employment.

Also, about 500 maintenance and flight-training jobs earmarked for Sheppard will go instead to Eglin Air Force Base in Florida to assist the new Joint Strike Fighter site.

Hutchison said that she has immediately begun working to get Sheppard considered as the permanent home for the JSF, after the pilots get initial training at Eglin, because the Florida base is not large enough to support the whole JSF mission, she said.

"The plan now is to go to bat for the JSF," Hutchison said. "I think down the road Sheppard will have a real significant part of the JSF," given that Sheppard is so close to the Fort Worth headquarters of Lockheed Martin, where the aircraft is now getting assembled.

The realignments at Sheppard were part of the major "joint" regroupings the Pentagon desired in its efforts to transform itself. In their deliberations, several of the commissioners praised the training at Sheppard, but said that in the end, consolidation was in the best interests of the military.

In the medical overhaul, the commissioners first voted to close Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., to create the new medical hub in Bethesda, Md., then it moved on to the San Antonio regional hub.

Retired Gen. Sue Ellen Turner, a former Air Force nurse who served at Sheppard, praised the base's high-quality enlisted medical training, but said she too had to support consolidation.

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"For as long as I can remember the combined medical services have tried to find a way to bring enlisted medical training together in one place," she said. "I think this proposal accomplishes that."

Commissioner Lloyd Newton, a retired Air Force general, said the medical consolidation was "an extraordinary move."

"Change is always hard," Newton said. "But I think when we look back a couple of years from now, we will see this was absolutely the right thing to do."

The loss for Wichita Falls was a win for San Antonio, which was approved by the BRAC commission to become one of two major medical military hubs in the nation, absorbing medical personnel and missions from several bases across the nation.

Hutchison noted the difference 10 years makes, when she was then working on the controversial, last-minute closure of Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio.

"When you look at this great win that San Antonio has, I think that it is justice come home," Hutchison said. "San Antonio is now the clear big winner in Texas, after being the big loser last time."

At the same time, she recognized that the losses the state faces are large. With one major realignment vote on Dyess Air Force Base looming, the state has absorbed three base closures - at Naval Station Ingleside, Lone Star Army Ammunitions Plant, and Brooks City Base, on top of the realignments at Sheppard and Lackland Air Force Bases, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, and realignments at Fort Bliss and Fort Hood.

"We didn't win every fight, but we certainly worked hard," Hutchison said. "The communities did a great job. On the loss side, I am looking for ways to mitigate losses."

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BRAC decisions with local implications pushed back

The Enid News and Eagle, Page 1

Staff and wire reports

26 August, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Siding with the Pentagon, the base-closing commission voted Thursday to shut down the Army's historic Walter Reed hospital and move about 20,000 defense workers miles away from their offices just outside the nation's capital.

The nine-member panel also started deciding which Air Force facilities should be closed or consolidated as part of the Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's nationwide restructuring of military bases.

Overall, the commission endorsed much of Rumsfeld's broader plan to streamline support services across the Army, Navy and Air Force. In many cases, it voted to merge programs scattered around military facilities across the country to centralized locations.

Just before adjourning for the day, the commissioners decided to shutter Air Force facilities in Alaska and California. But they postponed until today votes on the service branch's most contentious recommendations.

The Air Force wants to vastly reconfigure the Air National Guard, a move states fiercely oppose. It also wants to close Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota and Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico.

Mike Cooper, chairman of Vance Development Authority and Oklahoma Strategic Military Planning Commission, called Thursday "a very interesting day."

Decisions directly affecting Vance Air Force Base were postponed until today, Cooper said.

Vance Air Force Base, under Rumsfeld's recommendations, is slated not only to remain open but to pick up 99 new jobs, 93 military and six civilian. Vance also is projected to gain 13 T-6 and 12 T-38 aircraft.

Rumsfeld proposes moving A-10 close air support jets from Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina and Eielson AFB in Alaska to Moody AFB in Valdosta, Ga., then dividing Moody's pilot training mission among Vance, Columbus AFB in Mississippi and Laughlin AFB near Del Rio, Texas. Vance will receive some of Moody's Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training and Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals training for pilots and weapons systems officers.

"We are still working with the commission and their staff to ensure our realignment piece stays in place," Cooper

Two other Oklahoma facilities lost people Thursday as the commission voted to consolidate the civilian personnel office at Tinker Air Force Base with the office at Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio. That means Tinker will lose approximately 100 jobs.

In addition, Defense Finance and Accounting offices at Fort Sill Army Base near Lawton will be split among five other facilities across the country. That means Fort Sill will lose 233 jobs.

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Anticipating the high-stakes votes, the entire South Dakota congressional delegation -- Sens. John Thune, a Republican, and Tim Johnson, a Democrat, and Democratic Rep. Stephanie Herseth -- attended the hearing, as did Democratic Gov. Bill Richardson of New Mexico.

Late Thursday, the commission decided to approve its own proposal to close the Galena Airport Forward Operation Location in Alaska, which the Air Force uses for training and to land fighter jets when necessary. The Air Force had wanted to keep it open, but commissioners say other Air Force bases in Alaska suffice. The commercial airport there would continue operating.

The panel also chose to keep Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska operational, rejecting a Pentagon plan to sharply scale back personnel and aircraft there.

But commissioners did side with military planners in approving the closure of two other major bases -- Onizuka Air Force Station in California and Brooks City-Base in Texas.

As the commission tackled proposals that affected all the service branches, members focused on recommendations that sometimes were complex and interconnected.

"In this case, I'm pretty confident we got it right," commissioner Harold Gehman said, while considering a plan to consolidate some research and development activities. "But I'm telling you we're going to be faced with a bunch of these ... where I honestly do not know if we got it right or not."

Commissioner James Hill called the day's deliberations on the joint-services section agony and said the lengthy debate "highlights the complexity of these issues."

The politicians milled around the Arlington, Va., hotel ballroom where the hearings were held near the Pentagon, serving as constant reminders of their efforts to spare the bases that provide thousands of jobs in each state.

The commission signed off on many recommendations to merge education, medical, administrative and training programs, although it made adjustments in some cases. In others, the panel rejected the proposals outright. But those were in the minority. The Defense Department is trying to achieve what it calls "jointness" -- the services combining their strengths, rather than working separately -- to save money and promote efficiency.

Part of that effort was closing Walter Reed -- the crown jewel of U.S. military hospitals -- and moving much of its staff and services across town to National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., which will be updated and expanded. In a nod to the Army hospital's century-old heritage, the expanded facility will be renamed Walter Reed.

Some of the old hospital's personnel and operations also will move to a community hospital at Fort Belvoir in Virginia.

The commission said care at Walter Reed, which has treated presidents and foreign leaders as well as veterans and soldiers, is considered first-rate, but the facility is showing its age.

"Kids coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan, all of them in harm's way, deserve to come back to 21st century medical care," said commission Chairman Anthony Principi. "It needs to be modernized."

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The panel also largely sided with the Pentagon on shifting more than 20,000 military and civilian defense jobs from leased office space in northern Virginia suburbs of Washington to military bases farther away from the capital city.

Opponents had argued such a massive job shift could create traffic nightmares. But the Pentagon said military bases will provide a more secure setting, given threats of terrorism following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. On that day, one of the hijacked airplanes slammed into the Pentagon.

The commission must send its final report to President Bush by Sept. 8. The president can accept it, reject it or send it back for revisions. Congress also will have a chance to veto the plan in its entirety, but it has not taken that step in four previous rounds of base closings. If ultimately approved, the changes would occur over the next six years.

In May, the Pentagon proposed closing or consolidating a record 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations to save \$48.8 billion over 20 years, streamline the services and reposition the armed forces.

In the months since, the Air Force proposals have emerged as the most controversial. The Pentagon says they are designed to make the service more effective by consolidating both weapons systems and personnel as the Air Force moves to a smaller but smarter aircraft fleet.

The Air National Guard plan would shift people, equipment and aircraft around at 54 or more sites where Guard units are stationed. Aircraft would be taken away from 25 Air National Guard units. Instead of flying missions, those units would get other missions such as expeditionary combat support roles. They also would retain their state missions of aiding governors during civil disturbances and natural disasters.

Several states have sued to stop the shake-up, and the commission itself has voiced concern the plan would compromise homeland security.

Closing Cannon would cost Clovis, N.M., a small town on the Texas-New Mexico line, nearly 3,000 jobs on the base and as many as 2,000 more related jobs in the community. Home to four F-16 fighter squadrons, Cannon represents a third of the local economy in the community along the eastern edge of New Mexico.

News -- Eagle senior writer Jeff Mullin and The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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